



United States Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
One Blackburn Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

October 17, 2001

Dear Federal Tilefish Dealer:

The Fishery Management Plan for Golden Tilefish, which is effective on **November 1, 2001**, establishes an annual commercial quota for the golden tilefish fishery. As a requirement of the golden tilefish permit, you must report to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) all fish and shellfish purchased including all tilefish species. To ensure that only golden tilefish are counted against the quota for that species, it is important that you differentiate the different tilefish species when reporting your purchases. We have put together the following history of the tilefish fishery and a description of the habitat, distribution, and life history of tilefish.

Identifying tilefish species

The three most common tilefish species landed in the Atlantic Ocean north of the Virginia/North Carolina border are the golden tilefish, the blueline or gray tilefish, and the sand tilefish. In order to help you provide NMFS with the correct species information, a chart identifying the physical characteristics of these three species is attached. The characteristics of these species are also described below.

Golden Tilefish - There are two features that distinguish the golden tilefish from the blueline tilefish and sand tilefish. The golden tilefish has a yellow fleshy tab on top of its head just above the eye and its dorsal fin is spiny with large yellow spots. The body color is bluish green with many yellow spots on the upper body.

Blueline Tilefish - The blueline tilefish has a long snout with a narrow gold stripe underlined in blue, from the snout tip to the eye. It has soft dorsal fin rays, not spines, and has a dark predorsal midline. Another common name for blueline tilefish is gray tilefish.

Sand Tilefish - The sand tilefish has a very long and slender body that is generally pale gray to tan in color with a bluish tint. The tail fin is crescent shaped with very long lobes, which are orangish in color with a rather sharply defined dusky area above the center of the fin.

Reporting your purchases

Dealer Reports - Dealers must submit a report for **each** fishing trip from which purchases are made within sixteen (16) days of the end of the reporting week. Each report must include the following:

- Date of purchase
- Dealer name, address, and permit number
- Vessel name and permit number
- Pounds of each species (by market category, if applicable)

- Value of each species (by market category, if applicable)
- Port landed
- Dealer signature

If known, tilefish purchases must be reported to NMFS using the specific market category.

To help you provide this information, below are the species names and market categories for the three tilefish species described in Table 1. If you use our four-digit codes to report this information, those species codes are also provided. There are five market categories that are typically used in the tilefish fishery: large, medium, small, kittens, and extra large. If the market category does not fall into one of these five categories, or is unknown, please specify unclassified for the market category.

Table 1. Four-digit species codes (nespp4), species names, and market categories for the four tilefish categories (golden, sand, blueline and unclassified).

Market Category ▼	Golden Tilefish	Sand Tilefish	Blueline Tilefish	Unclassified Tilefish
Unclassified	4470	4450	4440	4460
Large	4471	4451	4441	4461
Medium	4472	4452	4442	4462
Small	4473	4453	4443	4463
Kittens	4474	4454	4444	4464
Extra Large	4475	4455	4445	4465

For additional information contained in this letter, please contact the following:

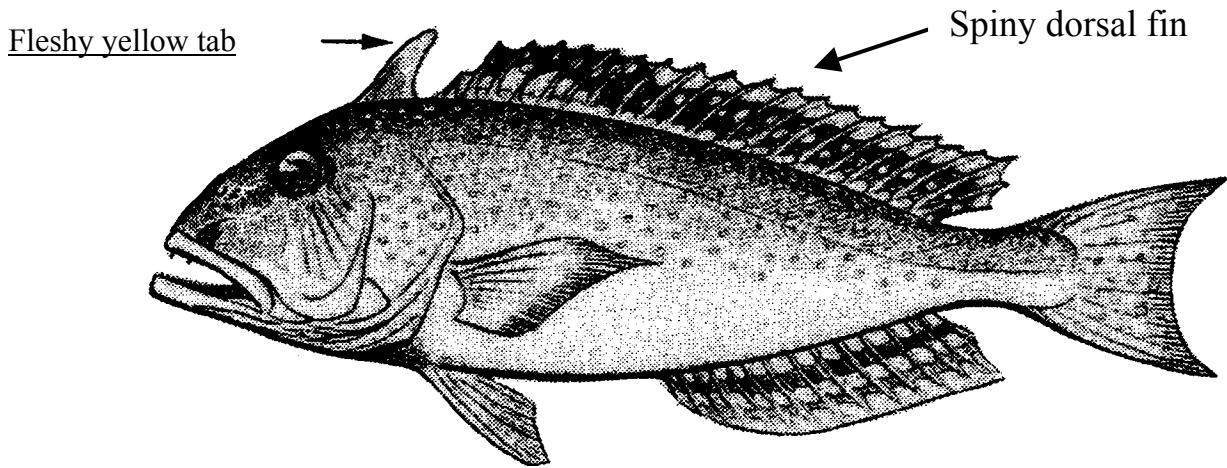
Reporting information	Local Port Agent	See attached list
Reporting information	Regional Office Email	reporting.ne@noaa.gov
Information in this letter	Fisheries Statistics Office Website	http://www.nero.nmfs.gov
Federal Permits	Permit Office	(978) 281-9370

Sincerely,

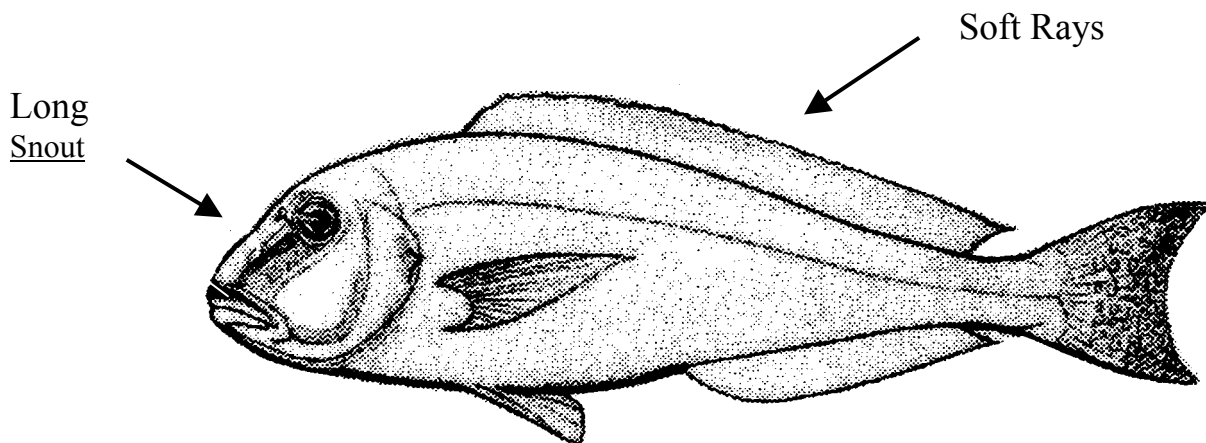
John F. Witzig, Ph.D.
Chief, Fisheries Statistics Office

Enclosures

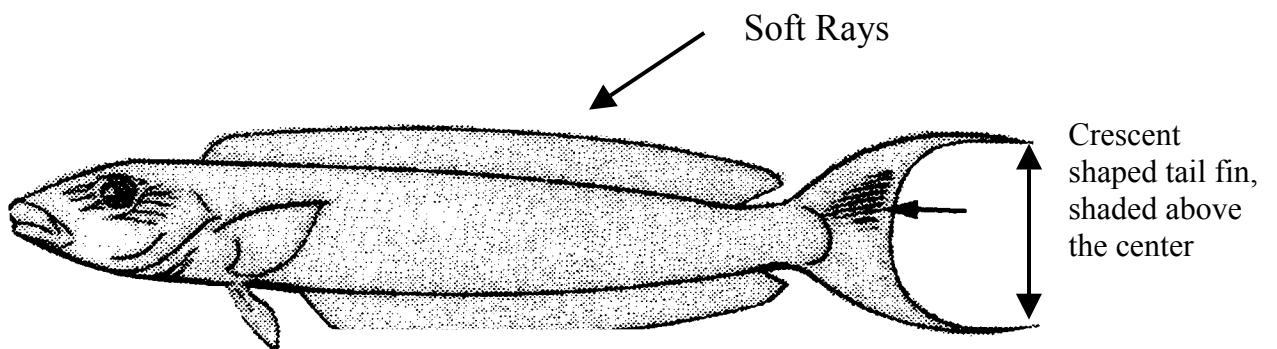
Identifying Characteristics of the Common Tilefish Species in North Atlantic Waters



Golden Tilefish



Blueline or Gray Tilefish



Sand Tilefish

Tilefish
by
Paul Nitschke

Tilefish, *Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps*, inhabit the outer continental shelf from Nova Scotia to South America, and are relatively abundant in the southern New England to mid-Atlantic area at depths of 80 to 440 m (44 to 240 fathoms). They are generally found in and around submarine canyons where they occupy burrows in the sedimentary substrate. Tilefish are relatively slow growing and long-lived, with a maximum observed age and length of 35 years and 110 cm (43.3 in.) for females and 26 years and 112 cm (44.1 in.) for males. At lengths exceeding 70 cm (27.6 in.), the predorsal adipose flap, characteristic of this species, is larger in males and can be used to distinguish the sexes. Tilefish of both sexes are mature at ages of 5 to 7 years.

Nominal catches were first recorded in 1915 (148 mt); a record total of 4,500 mt was taken in 1916, but only 5 mt were reported for 1920. Landings later increased to 1,000 to 1,500 mt during the early 1950s, followed by a decline to 30 mt in 1968-1969. Beginning in the early 1970s, a directed commercial longline fishery expanded rapidly in the Mid-Atlantic, and longlines have since been the predominant gear type used. Landings increased to 4,000 mt in 1979 before declining to about 2,000 mt annually from 1982-1986. More recent landings have generally been lower; the 1994-1998 average was 1,100 mt. A small recreational fishery developed during the late 1960s in New York and New Jersey but landings never exceeded 100 mt, and recent recreational catches have been negligible. Currently tilefish is not under management.

Landings and CPUE data indicate that tilefish were overexploited during the height of the longline fishery (between 1977 and 1982). Landings during this period were well above levels corresponding to long-term potential yield. This period was marked by steadily declining landings and CPUE, average landed size, and size at first maturity in males. Standardized CPUE for vessels in Barnegat, NJ declined from 0.21 kg/tub fished in 1973 to 0.05 kg in 1982, while the NEFSC standardized CPUE series for vessels in the Middle Atlantic-Southern New England region declined from 2.8 mt/days absent in 1979 to 0.45 mt in 1994. Since 1994, this index increased to 0.67 mt in 1998. Estimates of fishing mortality from virtual population analysis, or VPA, increased from 0.20 (1977) to 0.74 (1981). VPA estimates are not available for more recent years.

Long-term potential catch for tilefish is about 1,900 mt at $B_{msy}=8,400$ mt as estimated from a nonequilibrium surplus production model. Biomass-weighted F in 1998 was estimated to be 0.45, about twice as high as $F_{msy}=0.22$. The stock appears to have been stable at low levels of abundance in recent years. Total biomass in 1998 was estimated to be 2,900 mt, well below

B_{msy} .